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ABSTRACT

The program model presented in this handbook is directed to urban high schools in crisis. In 1982, Central High School in Providence, Rhode Island, was such a school. Thirty percent of the student body came from low-income families, violence erupted regularly, it was difficult to maintain discipline, academic achievement was consistently below average, and school/parent communication was ineffective. In that year Central High received a Ford Foundation grant to develop a program whose overall goal was to increase student ability to learn and achieve; intermediate goals were to create a positive school atmosphere and to improve the students' image of themselves and of the school. The major vehicle of change was to be a model of school/parent/community collaboration. This manual provides guidelines and procedures for the development of similar programs. The manual opens with graphic representations of (1) the overall program strategy: causes and effects; (2) the program model; and (3) staff organization. The remainder of the manual is divided into four sections dealing with the following major objectives: (1) strengthening parent and community participation; (2) insuring that program activities become an integral part of the school; (3) implementing and disseminating the model; and (4) documenting the process. Accompanying each objective are suggested related activities, a description of what was actually done in Central High, recommended changes, and listings of project materials. (KH)

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TURNING THE CORNER: HOW TO IMPROVE THE SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Central High School, Providence, Rhode Island and

The Ford Foundation City High School Recognition Program

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND INTRODUCTION

The program model presented in this handbook, TURNING THE CORNER: HOW TO IMPROVE THE SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE, is directed to urban high schools in crisis. In the 1970's and early 1980's these schools were typified by physical deterioration, large immigrant populations, low income or impoverished areas, racial tension and frequent outbreaks of violence.

In May 1982, Central High School of Providence, Rhode Island, fit that description and received a nominal sum from the Ford Foundation Urban Crisis High School Recognition Program; it was also therefore eligible for an additional sum of a more substantial nature. In 1982, based on the results of the first award, Central High School was awarded $20,000 to continue to improve the quality of education and student life. The Ford Foundation wanted, first, to reinforce activities already proven successful. Second, the Foundation asked that various facets of the program be organized, developed and documented in such a way that an ongoing structure would be created. Working committees including the Ford Foundation/Central High School Advisory Committee, the core team, was institutionalized. This formalization allows other communities to more easily implement such a program in their schools.

TURNING THE CORNER presents the work of the Recognition Program and provides the guidelines and procedures by which other schools and communities may develop similar programs. It emphasizes the "how-to" of a school/community collaboration and is designed as a practical, hands-on manual. Program staff believe that its identified goals and objectives were met successfully and that a workable model can be derived and applied elsewhere. Needless to say, schools and communities differ so individual groups must consider their specific needs, goals and objectives.

Many people participated in Central's program and its staff is appreciative and grateful. The following individuals have given of themselves to ensure a better educational environment for student, teacher and administrator. Their energy and commitment is exemplary.

Central High School additionally recognizes Dr. Marcia Marker Feld, Ms. Donna Vigneau and Ms. Patrice M. Gaudreau of the University of Rhode Island Urban Field Center; Mr. Stanley Crum, the Central High School Advisory Committee, the Ford Foundation Advisory Committee, and Mr. Edward Meade of the Ford Foundation for their contribution and support.

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TURNING THE CORNER: HOW TO IMPROVE THE SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE was written and designed by Anne Fishman

PROGRAM MODEL _____

In the 1970's and early 1980's Central High School exemplified an urban high school turned in on itself. Regarded as a feeding ground for interracial tensions, thirty percent of Central's student body came from low-income families. Violence erupted regularly. It was difficult if not impossible to maintain discipline; class cutting and poor attendance were typical. Students reflected their discontent in consistently below average academic achievement. Communication between school and parent was ineffective, particularly exaggerated by the large percentage of parents who were recent immigrants, negotiating many stressful adjustments. In sum, according to its principal, Central students had the feeling "they were going to the baddest school in the State."

Much of this description can be seen as explanation or symptom. But poor academic achievement was the key problem. The overall goal of the program was to increase the students' ability to learn and achieve. This was the desired end.

The intermediate goals were to create a positive school atmosphere and to improve the students' image of themselves and of the school. The means to these ends were to increase self-awareness and self-esteem on the part of the student body and to employ a model of school/parent/community collaboration as the major vehicle of change.

If Central is indicative, it is evident that given the opportunity the community can and will act as a stabilizing force. It responded to Central's invitation with energy, support and commitment. As hoped, access to information and the spirit of cooperation promoted positive feelings and the sense that school successes and failures were shared.

Educational research suggests that active participation of the general community and parents in particular result in a positive school climate and greater academic achievement. There are four overarching areas of activity that have such effects.

- Providing open access to members of the community
- Encouraging and aggressively seeking participation of recent immigrants with children who are first entering school
- Developing methods to increase all parents' awareness of their children's academic needs and potential
- Increasing parents' and students' knowledge of postsecondary education or career opportunities.

From these four general activities, program leaders identified five more specific activities.

1. Checking attendance and class cutting
2. Establishing child/parent advocates to work with the administration
3. Counseling
4. Orienting newcomers to the school community
5. Providing information regarding post-secondary options and opportunities

The program organization began to take shape as four main objectives were drafted. Each objective was divided into related activities and then further subdivided into action steps. Although there is some overlap, the objectives follow a reasonable chronology; therefore, the Program Model section of the handbook employs them as its organizational rubric. The discussion includes the objectives and activities as stated, what was in faact done, and what actions that either enhance or replace are recommended. Examples of actual materials are also provided. This structure, then, presents program intentions, reviews what occurred, and looks forward to what it and other communities might expect.

Three introductory graphic representations follow immediately, however. They delineate:

1. The Overall Program Strategy: Causes and Effects
2. The Program Model
3. The Organization of Staff

THE OVERALL PROGRAM STRATEGY: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

MODEL SCHOOL SITE

SCHOOL IN CRISIS

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Low morale
Poor academic achievement
Negative behavior

Positive school atmosphere is promoted

SEARCH FOR SOLUTION
Receive start-up monies
Results in increase in student and teacher morale; positive recognition of school
Publicity

Image of school changes in students' and community eyes

APPLY FOR AND RECEIVE LARGER FOUNDATION GRANT

Student self-awareness and Self-esteem is enhanced

Program plannning begins
Program staffing begins

Active parent involvement and successful advocacy occur

Parent coordinators hired

New immigrants are welcomed

Volunteer recruitment begins, particularly from minority groups
Volunteers are trained

Parents enjoy open access to student/school information

Career workshops are planned and implemented

Teachers, administrators, parents address attendance and cutting records of students
Meetings are scheduled

Staff meets regularly and documentation continues

DEFINE THE PROBLEM

What needs does your school have?

What approaches have already been taken?

With what result?

PLANNING THE PROGRAM

*Define Goals and Objectives

What is your overall goal?

What are secondary goals?

*Select Main Activities

What strategies does educational pedagogy suggest?

What are the four or five major activity areas that will address your goals?

*Establish Staff Requirements

What are the overall objectives?

What kind of staffing organization is required? Available?

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

*Recruit and Train Staff

From where will you recruit volunteers? How ill they be screened, selected and trained? Will you have seminars or manuals? Use the telephone or only letters? How will they record their work?

*Implement Program

What is your timeline? Workplan? Action steps?

*Monitor Program

Who will maintain wirtten records of these activities and actions?

*Document Activities

Will there be weekly reports? Regular staff meetings?

*Evaluate Activities

What will the research design for evaluation include?

Will you conduct interviews?

What is the schedule for evaluation?

PLANNING THE FUTURE

*Develop and Implement Funding Strategies

What educational foundations have funded schools such as yours? With what results?

Which local businesses or corporations have given grants?

What advantages are there for local businesses or community agencies if you undertake an improvement program?

Are there specific in-kind services that local companies can provide other than money (computer time, for example)?

*Disseminate Program

What materials are necessary to publicize your program? Brochure? Handbook? Slidetape? Videotape? Panel presentation?

What strategies will highlight the program in local, regional and national newspapers? Magazines? Television? What contacts do community members have to these media?

Which regularly scheduled meetings of teachers and administrators are held? Who attends these? Who prepared the program?

What educational or related conferences are scheduled locally? Regionally? Nationally? Can materials or representatives from your program be presented?

THE PROGRAM MODEL

ORGANIZATION OF STAFF MODEL

Parent Coordinator
21 Volunteers
Representing
Minority
Concerns

Members of the
Community
Ministerial Alliance
PTA
Rhode Island Urban League
Community Centers
Neighborhood

CORE TEAM

THE FORD FOUNDATION/
CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

Teachers
Principal
Students
Administrators

University Of Rhode Island
Urban Field Center
Partnership
Program

OBJECTIVE A: TO STRENGTHEN PARENT AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

THE PROPOSAL

Objective A : To continue to strengthen our parent and community participation in Central High School through a continuation and expansion of our current and past activities.

Activity 1: To have a parent or community resource staff member to assist the principal and act as an in-house coordinator of parent activities.

a. Identify and organize a volunteer corps of parents and community resources to serve as a liaison between school and home through telephone and direct contact. Recruitment of volunteers to be initiated through a slidetape.

b. Identify and coordinate parent and community resources to serve on a Ford Foundation Advisory Committee to be drawn from existing committees.

c. Act as advocate for parents in arranging conferences; attending such conferences hold with administrators and teachers. To support parents in such attendance and act on their behalf when parents are not available

d. Assist in orientation of new people with multi-ethnic needs who join the community.

Activity 2: To continue parent/student seminars as a public forum for sharing information needed to assist parents and students in preparing for postsecondary decisions regarding career options and/or college.

a. Conduct seminars after surveying parents as to appropriateness of time, location and topics. Possible topics include: SAT preparation, college entrance and admissions requirements, financial aid, civic service examinations and job outlook.

b. Encourage as an ongoing activity, parents and students of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural and diverse economic backgrounds to become contributing members of the community through a positive educational experience.

IN FACT

Hiring the parent/volunteer coordinator was of first priority. Seventeen community agencies received the job description prepared by the Providence School Department. Due to bureaucratic delays in the hiring process, two finalists were selected as co-coordinators. It was hoped that the additional person would compensate for lost time.

Both coordinators were members of a minority group; it was hoped that since there were but a few minority teachers, the students would see the coordinators as role models.

Coordinators actively recruited volunteers by personal contact, telephone and newspapers and through use of a slidetape.

Although the volunteer corps was intially responsible for liaison work between parent, student and school, only the coordinators, located on-site, was available for this.

Teachers and school administrators did accept the coordinators at meetings and conferences. Students did perceive them as advocates.

The following topics were identified for workshops: College Admissions, Alternatives to College, Financial Aid and Communications/ Discipline.

A shadowing program was instituted so that parents might freely follow their children throughout a school day. This was designed to provide open access for the parent to students, teachers and administrators. Shadowing also reduced the level of class cutting but was not solely employed as a disciplinary device. Students felt that their parents really cared; parents felt comfortable participating in the high school community.

The principal made initial invitations to twenty-two members of the community. Of this group, eleven people agreed to serve on the Ford Foundation Central Advisory Committee. The first meeting was attended by only half of the group.

The centralization of all financial activities at the central office level and through Providence City Hall created susbstantial delays in program implementation and receipt of necessary supplies. In addition, since money was so channeled, Central High School felt it was unable to patronize local stores and suppliers in the students' community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a process to expedite hiring procedures.

2. Include a clause in the grant contract that the actual scope of work time be contingent upon the date key personnel actually begin work.

3. The Ford Foundation should suggest a system to provide funds directly to the principal, who would be accountable for them.

4. While the on-site coordinators assumed the greatest responsibility as advocates, smaller groups of parents, particularly those who are bilingual in the languages of the student population should be trained as advocates.

5. The volunteer corps should welcome new community members. The family of each new student, particularly those of entering ninth graders, should receive a letter inviting them to an orientation. Older students and parents already acclimated to the new environment could take part in orientation sessions.

PROJECT MATERIALS

Volunteer Application

Job Description

Telephone Procedure

Sign-Up Sheet

Posting Sheet

Call Sheet

Memo regarding Volunteer Breakfast

Agenda of Career Workshops

OBJECTIVE B: TO INSURE THE ACTIVITIES BECOME AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE SCHOOL

OBJECTIVE B: To institutionalize these activites within Central High School to insure they become an integral part of the educational mandate of the school.

Activity 1: Train volunteer corps to continue and expand activities as outlined in Objective A in order to develop a mechanism to become self-sustaining. This mechanism includes the additional function of recruitment and training of new volunteers.

Activity 2: Develop a handbook of procedures which would codify the work of the parent coordinator and volunteer corps to insure continuity of the program.

Activity 3: Identify, with assistance of the Ford Foundation Advisory Committee, local funding to support these activities through businesses and local non-profit organizations.

IN FACT

Screening requirements for volunteers were established.

Volunteers were trained and instructed in their respective jobs as well as to the rules and regulations of the high school. Recording and reporting systems were developed and improved, presented and explained. Volunteers trained both in groups and individually. Their work was reviewed periodically.

Priorities and procedures were to be institutionalized to provide stability, continuity and a thorough knowledge of the program. Therefore, weekly reports, meeting minutes, agendas and formal reports were reviewed throughout the summer. Once the review was completed, an outline of established procedures was drafted and based on such documentation a handbook was derived. These materials will be disseminated at meetings held by the principal.

At this writing, five potential funding sources have been identified: two private foundations, one bank, the Rhode Island Urban League and the Central High School Alumni Association. Some monies have been received and contacts are being made with representatives of Rhode Island corporations in the Central community. Outreach has been conducted on local and national levels.

Prior to the opening of the 1983-1984 academic year, an organizational session was held for the volunteer corps. The principal appointed the High School Human Relations Specialist as coordinator URI Urban of volunteers subsequent to the termination of grant monies. The Field Center will continue to work with the program as long as it is able.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Members of the Ford Foundation/Central Advisory Committee and the volunteers should continue to present and discuss the positive educational experience now provided by Central High School. Members of the business community should be invited to the school to witness what has been accomplished thus far and can, with their support, continue.

2. Be creative in considering potential funders. Many small companies that do not have formal grant programs are interested in community support (as well as tax-deductible contributions). Be broad in your outreach, educating and informing the community at large.

3. Be equally creative in the kinds of funds you seek. That is, do not limit yourself to money. Some companies may be unable to outlay cash but can provide in-kind services (typewriters, telephone, office space, computers or computer time, photographers, food).

4. Companies and agencies respond to good reputations. It is worth your while to publicize your program, its goals and successes.

PROJECT MATERIALS

Meeting minutes

Weekly reports

Formal reports

Lists of Funding Sources

Meeting Agendas

OBJECTIVE C: TO IMPLEMENT AND DISSEMINATE THE MODEL

Objective C: To provide assistance for implementation of model in selected Providence feeder middle schools and high schools and to provide dissemination of models throughout high school network.

Activity 1: Establish and train a core team comprised of a Central High School administrator, teacher(s), parent(s), community resource(s) and student(s) to make a presentation and offer technical assistance relative to the activities and outcomes of educational experiences developed at Central High School.

Activity 2: Provide opportunities for the Central High School prinicipal to make personal contact with colleagues at the middle school and high school levels to share information and experiences regarding community involvement in the school.

Activity 3: Document the year's activities and develop a brochure describing the project and how it can be replicated in other Providence schools.

Activity 4: Develop and initiate dissemination process so model can be replicated in interested sites throughout the national network.

IN FACT

The University of Rhode Island Urban Field Center staff reviewed all program documentation and produced a brochure describing the program and its replicability.

The brochure was distributed throughout the Providence schools.

The principal has made presentations to the parent groups of four feeder middle schools as well as to the principals of Providence's other two high schools.

The core team is in place and will utilize the slidetape during 1983-1984. This activity was delayed due to the initial delay in program implementation.

The principal has been asked to speak at:

National Association of Secondary School Principals
Annual Conference
Las Vegas
January 1984

Northeast Regional Exchange
More Effective Secondary School Conference
January 1984

Anti-Defamation League Annual Conference
"Prejudice Reduction: The Role of the School"
February 1984

Northeast Regional Educational Media Leadership Conference
"Marketing the Urban High School
April 1984

and will use the brochure/slidetape/handbook to support his presentation and provide more detail to interested communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The principal should continue to informally discuss the program with colleagues as well as offer the core team to present at the principals' monthly meeting.

2. The core team should be included on the agenda for faculty meetings at each of the feeder middle schools, the other high schools and the alternative high school. The team should use the slidetape and bring brochures as well as samples of the handbook.

3. The brochure should be printed in large quantities so that it can be freely distributed locally, statewide and nationally at conventions and seminars.

4. The brochure should be distributed through the Rhode Island Superintendent's Association, and the core team should follow-up this mailing to arrange for presentations.

5. The handbook should be advertised in educational journals such as the Phi Delta Kappan and educational newspapers such as Education Week and Education USA.

6. Some research should be done to explore other non-educational but related outlets such as sociologists, urban planners and community/social workers.

MATERIALS

Agendas for presentations

Panel Participants

Slidetape narrative

Brochure

Handbook

Lists of Related Professional Associations

Responses to presentations

OBJECTIVE D: TO DOCUMENT THE PROCESS

OBJECTIVE D: To document the process of this proposal's activities and to evaluate the success of these activities.

Activity 1: Develop process for documentation of project activities.

Activity 2: Collect data of all activities through attendance at key meetings, review of data collected by project personnel and interviews of selected persons who have participated in project activities.

Activity 3: Report to project personnel monthly on activities.

Activity 4: Produce a brochure that meets Objectives C and D.

IN FACT

Weekly reports were submitted by the two coordinators, although with some resistance. Coordinators felt that paperwork required too much time and detracted from the actual work of the program. The principal and URI Urban Field Center staff attempted to explain the key role that documentation and evaluation play in both its dissemination of the program and its responsibility to the Ford Foundation. Different formats of reporting were employed.

A timeline for meeting objective deadlines was designed.

Monthly workplans which subdivided major activities into their component tasks were formulated. These workplans delineated the actual task, whose responsibility(ities) it was and what projected dates of completion.

Notes, agendas and meeting minutes were maintained according to objectives.

Evaluation questionnaires were developed for all major activities. These were completed by participants and then analyzed by Field Center staff.

All these instruments were reviewed during monthly meetings by the principal, Field Center staff and parent coordinator(s).

MATERIALS

Workshop Evaluations

Timeline

Workplans for Key activities

Goals and Objectives subdivided into Action Steps

Weekly Plan Sheet

Evaluation Research Design

Interview Questions for Program Evaluation

Memos and Minutes of Meetings

CONCLUSION

At this writing, the 1983-84 academic year is underway. Central High School is enjoying its growing reputation as a model site. Dissemination and funding activities are beginning to bring positive results. Additional educational possibilities frequently are presented as local and national audiences respond to Central's new image.

In retrospect, the notion of image seems increasingly critical: as much a cause as an effect. That is, just receiving the initial monies represented a statement that the school was worth something. The student body began to react to itself with greater pride and the program provided the avenues for that energy.

Fundamentally, however, the success of this project is due to the hard work and enthusiasm of the principal, Mr. Arthur Zarrella and his ability to work closely and compatibly with parents, community and students. The basic trust and credibility which he has engendered during the last eight years was the springboard from which the project took off. With the funds from the Ford Foundation, however, the principal could then translate his knowledge and capacity into an operational program.

Perhaps the most important information for other communities is that the Ford Foundation High School Recognition Program worked. School attendance was improved by 10 percent; drop-out rate was reduced to 22 percent from a high of 31 percent (national 27 percent); extra-curricular activities are garnering student interest. The structures for continual communication, growth and change are in place. But no magic was involved, really; it can be done. Your school community can turn itself around too.